

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: November 10, 2008

Agenda Item: Elk Archery Committee Report/Recommendations

Division: Wildlife

Time Needed for this Work Session: 60 minutes

Background

On March 13, 2008 the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission instructed FWP staff to assemble a nine-member advisory committee to assess the recently passed elk-archery regulations in 23 hunting districts outside the Missouri River Breaks. A call for nominations met with nearly 40 respondents. Nine members were selected in an effort to represent landowners, outfitters, sportsmen and women, local governments and businesses. Residents—from across Montana—and nonresidents were represented. Commissioner Dan Vermillion and an FWP representative also participated in committee discussions. The first meeting took place in June with the final and sixth meeting on Oct. 3. Meetings were facilitated and included “trap line” reports, breakout sessions, informational presentations and general discussion. Meetings were publicly announced and public-comment opportunities were available at each meeting.

The FWP Commission created this committee in recognition of contention and continued debate over the new elk-archery season structure in 23 hunting districts for the 2008 and 2009 hunting seasons. In general, the new regulations require archers to apply for permits for the first time for either sex-elk during the archery season wherever either sex-elk permits are in place for rifle hunters. The permits are unlimited in 2008, but are to be capped at 100 percent of the 2008 application rate for the 2009 season. The reasons to require permits for archery hunters included hunter equity, hunt quality, hunter shift, access and management effectiveness.

The committee expanded its discussions and recommendations beyond the 2009 elk archery season in the 23 hunting districts outside the Breaks. Recommendations that likely could not be implemented in 2009 for reasons of authority or process include potentially adjusted drawing process for rifle and archery permits (separate drawing for each) and potentially adjusted permit allocation to nonresident hunters holding a variably priced license. While the loss of hunter “mobility” was a significant discussion item, there was also general recognition that if access were significantly improved (increased), other elements (crowding, equity, effectiveness, hunter shift) would likely be indirectly but capably addressed. Specific recommendations that could potentially be enacted for the 2009 hunting season include:

- continue permit system in the 23 districts outside the Breaks with all districts grouped into one bundle and with permits capped at 150 percent of the 2008 permit level and offer A9/B12 antlerless licenses for archery on private land in those of the 23 districts that are over objective;
- maintain elk-archery permits in hunting districts 410/417, 620/621/622 and 700/701 at 100 percent of the 2008 permit level; and
- offer party application for elk archery permits in both areas.

At this writing, there is also a written dissent asking for the new regulations to be completely rescinded coupled with adjustments to access programs.

As a FWP Commission work-session item, FWP will coordinate the presentation of the advisory committee's recommendations and seek direction on formally developing or not a tentative proposal for the Commission to consider for the 2009 hunting season.